

# **Bridging Science and Spirituality with Philosophy<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Preamble**

Most people, even today, believe that a large ditch spreads out between science and spirituality so that one stands either on one side or on the other. The same horizon viewed from each edge implies two divergent landscapes. The one ends up in nothing but matter, the other leads to a foggy imaginative vision of paradise. It would be neither useful nor wise to attempt to fuse together the views of these two sides. The situation calls for a further exploration concerning the two elements of the theme through examination of their purposes, their methods, their instruments, and their fields of investigation. And at a certain point, analyzing and estimating these would bring some inevitable questions upon the role of philosophy in rapport with the development of science and spirituality. Eventually, a summary of the sharing will venture some perspectives as an attempt of looking towards the future.

## **Some clarifications**

The word ‘science’ indicates several meanings. Generally speaking, it is equivalent to theoretical knowledge and the practical know-how. In more specific cases and due to diversifications, it may mean a set of knowledge and information about a defined subject or about a specific sphere. For example, physics which studies matter, its constituents, characteristics, behavior, etc. is part of science as well as geology which studies the planet Earth, and its evolution. In this talk the term “science” is used in its general meaning.

The word ‘spirituality’ indicates the ways of thinking and practices aiming at getting nearer to the spirit that is considered as the essence of life. These practices do not necessarily have connection with a specific religion, as long as universal moral or ethics is respected and applied. In that trend of meaning, a (commonly) religious person may not necessarily be a spiritual one, and a spiritual person logically would opt for freedom of thought rather than remaining bound to a set of beliefs, hence his independence towards religions.

## **Purposes**

**Science aims at gaining knowledge.** Since the latter seems infinite, science diversifies itself in more and more sophisticated forms of disciplines. This movement seems unavoidable. Increase of the amount of knowledge with innumerable technical details cannot but result in more and more academic disciplines in order to cover more domains of knowledge. In ancient times and up to a

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quite recent period, one could have been at the same time a physicist, physician, astronomer, alchemist, etc. This was the case of many well-known names in history such as Aristotle, Descartes, Newton, etc. Nowadays, some disciplines have to be explained as to their definition in order to give a slightest clue to them. In its over-diversification, science certainly would gain understanding of its purpose in clarifying the process and the orientation of its own developments. Yet while operating and gaining more knowledge, **science fundamentally keeps its original purpose, that of understanding how nature proceeds, i.e. how things have turned out to be what they are.**

**Spirituality**, instead of increasing knowledge and through its various practices, **tends to strip off the mind of what is material-bound in order to ease its approaching the core of life, the Ultimate or Reality.** In its action it does not abstain from referring to scientific discoveries. **This constitutes one of the main divergences of attitude between traditional religions and genuine spirituality: the non-rejection of facts and the spirit of exploration into the unknown.**

### **Methods**

Methods of science and those of spirituality differ little. Indeed, a great similarity links them together up to the moment of appraising the results.

### **Similarities of methods**

Science, as well as spirituality, proceeds through:

- 1 – Setting a pre-hypothesis.
- 2 – Observing, the first step (which is also the first step of learning). Perception needs accuracy to make the data exploitable.
- 3 – Recording follows observation; it needs also accuracy. Integrity constitutes the required condition. The results of perception should not be distorted because they will act as sound basis for proceeding work.
- 4 – Reasoning by applying sound foundation towards confirming pre-hypothesis or speculating a new hypothesis. – The process needs rigor in reasoning.
- 5 – Testing: inventiveness within integrity helps setting proper experimentation.
- 6 – Counter-reasoning based on:
  - Criticizing = contradictory reasoning, refutation;
  - Integrity = intellectual honesty, not trying to match hypothesis with observed facts in order to comply with one's own hypothesis.
- 7 – Appraising of results.
- 8 – Tentative conclusion: conclusions are always temporary.
- 9 – Transferring the levels: from physical particular observations to intellectual general concepts – i.e. laws.

In the reasoning process, many 'techniques' are used. **Deduction** proceeds from the general to particulars; it is explained by logicians in a complex way. I.K. Taimni has the merit of explicitly and successfully expounding it while explaining it in the context of the functioning of the mind. Studying his illuminating commentaries on the Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali [*The Science of Yoga*], one can identify deduction under the term '*vitarka*'.

Syllogism is a specific form of deduction often considered as its lesser form. Indeed, it can lead to some hazardous conclusion.

[Example: humans are selfish; Tom is a human, so Tom is selfish

More hazardous: Dogs have tails; my turtle has a tail, so my turtle is a dog...]

On the other hand, **induction** proceeds from the particulars to the universal. Induction was approached in diverse manners by logicians, without much clarity and help for laymen. Still I.K. Taimni gave the benefit to laymen by casting insight into the technique, by clarifying the term '*vichara*'.

[Example: bamboos are vertical, trees are vertical; bamboos and trees indicate verticality]

In passing, in a larger scale, *vichara* constitutes the core teaching of Ramana Maharshi, the seer of Arunachala.

The pair **deduction-induction** forms the main modus operandi of the process of reasoning. Yet **analogy** constitutes another form of reasoning, advocated by Mme Blavatsky. The three do not form yet the set of thinking process. Let us come back later.

### **Discrepancy by time factor**

Methods of science and spirituality follow the similitude until the estimation of results. The discrepancy lies in the time factor. Indeed, for science the time to reach a possible estimation of the results may be feasible for a human life. Not so for spirituality.

An example for science and for spirituality can illustrate this discrepancy. Let's consider the *hypothesis of morphogenetic field* by Rupert Sheldrake, and the *hypothesis of reincarnation* in spirituality, hypothesis accepted by many eastern religious traditions.

Sheldrake's *morphogenetic field*, despite rejection from the orthodox scientists' community, can be testified by many experiments. It is appreciated by the avant-garde scientists and thinkers. In parallel, the spiritual thesis of *reincarnation*, having been accepted by most people in the eastern world, still remains to be proved.

This time factor causes major difficulty, if not impossibility, for spirituality to estimate the results so that conclusion, even temporary, cannot be drawn, etc.

### **Instruments**

Science and spirituality do use a common instrument for investigation, the mind. Nonetheless, science, using the mind, invents other instruments to better fit to the material field of investigation. The most evident examples can be quoted with the invention of telescopes and microscopes which prolong and increase the capacity of human vision in the infinitely great and

the infinitesimal. Furthermore, science, helped by technology – its progeny – continues to grow faster and faster into techno-science. Likewise, the science of space incessantly and tremendously influences life on earth with miniaturization and utilization of newly synthesized and composite materials.

Spirituality, although using the mind, does not invent technologies to investigate. The main reason lies in the inadequacy with the field of investigation. **This leads to the question of the field.** Yet, before going into this question, let us consider the instrument commonly used by both science and spirituality, i.e. the mind.

### **The mind, instrument of investigation**

Rigorous exploration of the mind led to the discovery that the methods of science and those of spirituality fundamentally do not differ up to a certain moment. This exploration certifies to one of the extraordinary capacities of consciousness, that of observing and seeing how a dual mind works. Indeed, in fragmenting its own field, the mind applies dichotomy on anything in its content.

One can first wonder why science and spirituality should oppose to each other. Is it not because the concrete mind cannot regard both differently as mere opposites? Why is it so? Is it not that the mind, as an instrument of measure, has been tainted itself by its particulars - just as lens specifically colored are “tainted” - so that anything the mind observes gets tainted with the same color? Thus the dualistic trend of mind lets duality get into its view so that always there is one and there is the other. Diverted by its dualistic trend, the mind by itself cannot see itself. One can recall the well-known Chan (Zen) koan where the master asked the disciple to seize his own hand with the same hand.

Then some serious questions arise as a consequence:

**1 – How can the instrument see itself as an instrument?**

**2 – What observes the duality of mind?**

They can be kept for later examination.

### **Fields of investigation**

Science deals with the field of matter, which becomes wider and wider simultaneously with the progress made by science during the investigation. The knowledge about matter has evolved so much from the ancient atomists’ theory to the present speculations. One can call this field the ‘objective world’, the ‘outer world’ by opposition to this part called the ‘inner’, ‘subjective’ world. What is it? It comprises all material things woven together into a complex network, visible or invisible, nevertheless possible of being tracked.

Spirituality through observation of both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ world, investigates principally the ‘inner’ world. All that occurs in both worlds pertains to the world of phenomena. Consequently, observation of both worlds applies to the phenomenal appearance of things, of objects, of events but not observation of things themselves.

Here, more serious questions arise:

**3 – How can science operate to reach things, objects, and events themselves and not only their appearances?**

**4 – How can science – through observation of appearances of things – speculate on the (ontological) nature of these?**

**5 – Dealing with the so called ‘inner world’, how to be certain of things and events one observes?**

**6 – Consequently, the key word for both science and spirituality seems to be ‘uncertainty’.**

Moreover, the world in which we live is one. Its dichotomization into two separate parts is due to duality of mind. It can be soundly presumed that as long as the mind does not overcome this aspect, it will continue to adduce dualistically perceived results as erroneous input for thinking.

### **More about the fields of investigation**

Since the world is one, the field of investigation is one. What is the field? Is it not the whole Existence, the whole Manifestation?

Science investigates it, tries to know more and deeper about it. Spirituality can do the same, with similar methods and more; it can benefit from knowledge reaped by science... But still, science with its knowledge of the field is in the main incapable to offer a clear insight into it.

One can here evoke the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gîta (all names of characters are stripped out of the quotation to make it intelligible):

Disciple’s (Arjuna) expressing his ardent desire:

1 - Matter (*Prakriti*) and Spirit (*Purusha*), the Field and the Knower of the Field, knowledge and the object of knowledge, (I ardently desire to learn about them).

Spiritual instructor’s (Krishna) answer:

2 - This Body is called the Field; that which knows the Field is called by the Seers, the Knower of the Field.

3 – The knowledge of the Field together with the knowledge of the Knower of the Field constitutes the true illumination and the only wisdom.

Since Spirit (*Purusha*) is the Knower of the Field (of Existence) which is Matter, another question arises:

**7 – Who, or rather, what knows both the Field and the Knower of the Field?**

This question is the impossible question; it cannot be answered....

### **The role of philosophy**

It is said that Mathematics is to provide conceptual evidence of scientific observation. Can’t philosophy then be considered a step towards spirituality? Exploring the nature of mind by using the mind has been compared to the act of cutting a diamond with a diamond. All the thinking, reasoning, estimating, etc. pertain to philosophy. How can one live without thinking, reasoning, discerning? In other words, how can one live without philosophy? Those actions define and

characterize a human being through the use of the mind. When one is attempting to understand science and spirituality, when one is trying to find their relations, thinking is in movement; philosophy cannot be discarded.

Now, thinking operates on different levels; thinking in philosophy is slightly different from thinking in 'how to solve' a problem of a material order. When one tries to solve a problem of material order, the examination of the "problem" engages a large proportion of analysis. This analytical function holds a lesser part in philosophical thinking in which the synthetic and intuitive function would prevail. Philosophy does not and is not meant to solve contingencies or trivialities; its domain of action belongs to the immense and yet subtle sphere of life and death, and still more.

One of my French intellectual guides, a friend from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Montaigne, advised:

'To philosophize is to learn to die in a way'

[Philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir un peu]

Indeed, thinking consistently about life is part of self-education and entirely education of the mind; thus thinking about life, 'philosophizing', may result in understanding the great Life which includes life and death, the significance of life, the value of moral, the task of a human in his community, etc. i.e. inexhaustibly all subjects of essential order.

Like science, genuine philosophy does not take a stand, but instead it refers to reasoning. The intellectual neutral attitude amounts to a pose which resembles skepticism. When it is sound, it acts like liberating doubt. The mind walked away from belief and remains unbound. We shall revert to the notion of 'unbound mind' further.

To this point, two other questions legitimately arise:

### **8 – Can one learn philosophy?**

The answer was already given by Emmanuel Kant:

One cannot learn philosophy, the only thing one can do is to philosophize.

### **9 – Can philosophy be just speculative?**

The answer is quite obvious: no, it can't. Whatever the term 'philosophy' may mean, 'love of wisdom' (Pythagoras) or 'wisdom of love' (H.P.B. according to theosophists; Heidegger according to academics...), the wisdom and the love is there to prompt to comply with the two, wisdom and love, in thinking, in speech, and in action. That is philosophy which made Rabelais, the French free thinker, predecessor of Montaigne, say:

'Science without conscience is the ruin of the soul.'

[Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme]

This indubitably leads to the notion of ethics.

### **The role of ethics**

It was mentioned above that the required conditions of the methods are accuracy, integrity, rigor of reasoning, and inventiveness. All these are of spiritual nature allying ability, shrewdness, and

moral demand. Moral demand particularly interests us here. Not this type of narrow moral to be applied in order to have a good management of a community's life. Ethics is neither the good will of utilitarian positivism, expressed in the motto "The greatest happiness for the greatest number of people". Eventually, the application of this motto would end up in worshipping humanity as did the original leader of positivism, Auguste Comte.

Ethics, being the foundation of spirituality, stands at the stage of intention and motivation. A scientist may have the intention to search for more knowledge in order to improve human conditions; another can be motivated just by the race to get a reward (like Nobel Price for example...). The difference between the two is of an ethical order. A physicist who explores matter to know more about its behaviour in order to understand how things proceed and while doing so trying to get a clue on the concept of the 'ultimate origin' is a spiritual person, without being formally named as such.

Ethics not only stands for the motivation, it also determines one's attitude towards life. As life is always surprising, it demands a great deal of trust and inventiveness. This dynamism in life is no different from awareness or attention. Here one can revert to the question: How can the mind as an instrument see itself as an instrument? The answer may be given: it can't, yet there is a seeing as a witness, when awareness is present. To the inquiry 'Who is observing, what is watching in observation?' one can recall the answer by Jiddu Krishnamurti who said 'Awareness is intelligence in action'.

Earlier in this sharing, it was said that the mind has been conditioned by duality; here the action of intelligence, meaning awareness, dissolves duality. More clearly, **duality disappears when intelligence is at work.**

### **Further with philosophy**

It was mentioned earlier that deduction, induction, analogy, the three do not suffice to the thinking process. Indeed, in some places of her Secret Doctrine, H.B.P. mentioned the two truths, *paramartha satya* (absolute or ultimate truth) and *samvriti satya* (relative or conventional truth). These two notions were employed by Nagarjuna, the great philosopher (second century CE) if not the unsurpassable. He advocated that everything that exists is ultimately empty of any intrinsic nature but does exist conventionally. One may assume that things exist only through their mutual relationships, meaning that there cannot be a separate thing existing by itself, independently from everything. The 'technique' of Nagarjuna consists of **refutation** and **negation** up to the point where it is impossible to go further because the mind is stripped off argumentation; it becomes 'still'. The process is from *madhyamaka* philosophy, more recently used by Jiddu Krishnamurti under the form of 'dialogue'. One may make an analogy between the 'stillness of mind' with the state of emptiness (*sunyata*) from Madhyamaka of Nagarjuna', elsewhere known as 'dialectics'. And according to the sixth patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism, Hui-Neng (Eno), wisdom is a consequence of emptiness. One can again presume that *sunyata* sounds to be the ultimate of all things, everything IS in itself emptiness and each one begins its existence only in relationship with things in its surroundings. Venturing a supposition, one can say that **the three aspects *vichara*, *madhyamaka*, and *sunyata* may be respectively the route showed (always moving towards**

**more and more general, *vichara*), the walking out of one's own path (through reasoning until this would be 'worn out', *madhyamaka*), and the goal (*sunyata*). *Sunyata* is the goal, the guide, and the Wisdom itself.**

### Summary

Science aims at gaining knowledge and understanding of how nature proceeds so that things have turned out to be what they appear now. Spirituality aims at approaching the core of life, the Ultimate. Both use similar methods up to the extent of the limits of science, which is the 'outer, objective, manifested' world. Spirituality continues to explore the 'inner' part of the Field. None of them can reach the ontological nature of things, so the questions raised lead to a common situation for both: **uncertainty**.

Keeping this uncertainty in mind, science and spirituality can continue using the same methods (deduction, induction, analogy, etc.) and explore further with critics, refutation, and negation. Yet to touch the frontier of reasoning with the impossible question: 'What knows both the manifested world (the Field) and the Knower of the Field?' the mind gets to the point beyond all possible refutation. Then this question once asked leads the inquirer out of the domain of science. Furthermore, the daring scientist who ventures to ask it is a 'spiritual scientist'.

Reasoning, questioning, asking fundamental questions pertains to the domain of philosophy. A scientist cannot abstain from philosophy; otherwise he would be a 'technician' of science dealing with the grossest level of matter with a vision limited by this level. **Science would benefit much by letting itself be penetrated by philosophy, because philosophy would guide science from its interest of knowing to the concern for the meaning of the investigation, the concern for Life and Truth.** Here again, pondering over these two fundamental issues, Life and Truth, necessarily induces one to explore the question of ethics already skimmed through earlier.

### Perspectives

Being bound to the phenomenal world, science, reaching perhaps a wide range of knowledge, would not move further in comprehension of life without the acceptance of the concomitant process of philosophy. Science will always have a task and a role in the destiny (*dharma*) of the mind. Spirituality is concerned with the essence of life and its ultimate origin. Philosophy brings completion by offering the complementary note which is the search for truth. Truth is 'That is' (*Sat*, in the motto of the Theosophical Society). To venture a speculation..., '**That is**' may be the last step prior to the Ultimate.... It is also *sunyata*, the state in which only One is possible. That is the true Wisdom.

One can presume that the world may survive without religions but it will perish without spirituality. The last question can be asked: how can one think to get understanding of Life? Should one be a learned person to come through expertise? You have guessed the answer.... If one counted on expertise to approach life, one is ahead towards confusion. Is there a deadlock here? Not at all. Life is moving forward like an irresistible stream flowing from the Ultimate. And the answer was given by the Chinese seer (of the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), Confucius, by his reply to his audience: '**I am not a learned man; my thinking proceeds from the Unique**'.